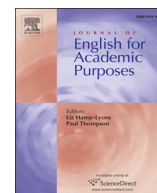




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Journal of English for Academic Purposes

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jeap](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jeap)



## Publishing research in English-language journals: Attitudes, strategies and difficulties of multilingual scholars of medicine



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 31 January 2013

Received in revised form 30 July 2014

Accepted 11 August 2014

Available online 19 September 2014

#### Keywords:

Multilingual scholars of medicine

Needs analysis

English for research publication purposes

### ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades a growing number of multilingual scholars have shown an increasing interest in having the results of their research published in English-language journals. Many of these researchers, however, experience difficulties in producing effective research articles (RAs) to meet the expectations of their international disciplinary communities. In this paper we report some of the results obtained from the analysis of the responses to a large-scale online survey [<http://eneida.unileon.es/eneidaquestionnaire.php>] which was administered to Ph.D.-holding researchers from various disciplines, affiliated to five Spanish teaching and research institutions. The results we present here are related to Spanish scholars of Medicine, a field of research in which researchers are in need of specialized assistance in English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP). We focus on their motivations for reporting their research in English, their writing strategies, past publishing experiences and future needs for training in ERPP. The findings revealed an overall positive attitude towards writing in English, although difficulties with specific discourse features and with the most challenging sections and aspects of the RA were also identified. The information derived from this survey should allow us to design training materials that can be of assistance to multilingual scholars of medicine.

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## 1. Introduction

In response to a range of socio-economic and political factors (see, for example, Ammon, 2001; Ferguson, 2007), the last two decades have seen a growing trend towards globalization of research, a trend that has gained such momentum that today English is the primary medium of academic publication even in those countries in which it is not an official language (Lillis & Curry, 2010). As a result of this, multilingual scholars have a greater need to publish in English-medium journals in order to make their research visible to a wider audience and gain international recognition. The tendency of national research evaluation bodies to reward publications in high-impact English-language journals with more credits when deciding on promotion, research funding and salary increment (see, for example, Curry & Lillis, 2004; Feng, Gulbahar, & Dawang, 2013; Lee & Lee, 2013; Moreno, 2010) has led to a situation in which many multilingual

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researchers seem to be compelled to write in English. This, however, is not the case in all disciplinary areas. The rise of English as the language of scientific publication is more prevalent in the Hard and Social Sciences than in it is in the Humanities (Ammon, 2001; Ferguson, 2007; Giannoni, 2008; Swales, 2004). In the Spanish academic context, for instance, Fernández Polo and Cal Varela (2009) and Gea-Valor, Rey-Rocha, and Moreno (2014) have noted that researchers who work in Experimental Sciences and Health Sciences departments are more likely to publish in English than their counterparts in Humanities, Social Sciences and Law. Burgess, Gea-Valor, Moreno, and Rey-Rocha (2014) have also made the case that the desirability of publishing in English is greater in some fields such as Chemistry or Business Management than in others such as History, in which many researchers still resist the hegemony of English as the language of scientific output. These studies point to the fact that the motivations and needs of English as an Additional Language (EAL) scholars vary across disciplinary contexts. It is, therefore, important to look into the current attitudes and needs (language proficiency level, recurrent rhetorical difficulties, writing and learning strategies, etc.) of EAL scholars in particular fields with a view to isolating those variables that are of relevance to the process of writing and learning to write in English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP).

Recent efforts to facilitate publication have given rise to a growing volume of intercultural and cross-disciplinary genre-analytic research which provide descriptive examinations of the textual differences (and similarities) between EAL scholars' practices when writing in English and in other languages such as Chinese (e.g. Taylor & Chen, 1991), Finnish (e.g. Mauranen, 1993), Czech (e.g. Čmejrková, 1996), Malay (e.g. Ahmad, 1997) or Italian (e.g. Giannoni, 2008). Spanish has not been an exception (see Burgess, 2002; Lorés-Sanz, 2009; Martín-Martín, 2008; Moreno, 1998; Mur Dueñas, 2007; Sheldon, 2011, to cite just a few). All these studies of academic genres are particularly interesting in that they raise the issue of determining which aspects of academic discourse are subject to restrictions arising from the writing conventions of the genre and the discipline, and which aspects are governed by socio-cultural or socio-pragmatic factors. Other studies, largely using an ethnographic approach, have focused on the academic writing processes and difficulties of EAL scholars when striving to publish in this language (see, for example, Curry & Lillis, 2004; Flowerdew, 1999a, 1999b, 2001; Hanauer & Englander, 2011; Lillis & Curry, 2006, 2010; Mur Dueñas, 2012). Many of these studies have emphasized the linguistic inequalities, and even non-linguistic handicaps, such as a lack of financial and material resources (see Belcher, 2007; Canagarajah, 2002; Salager-Meyer, 2008). Ammon (2012), for example, claims that, because of serious linguistic barriers and refusal to participate in linguistically "unfair" scientific communication, many non-anglophone contributions are excluded in international fora, leading to skewed scientific development. Other authors, however, such as Ferguson, Pérez-Llantada, and Plo (2011), argue that the claim that linguistic inequality exists should be supported with evidence, since native English-speaking scholars may also have difficulties in acquiring a good command of academic literacy. They contend that experience or the lack of it also plays its part in determining just how difficult research writing might be (see also Swales, 2004).

Be that as it may, publishing in English-medium journals has widely been reported as representing an additional hurdle for users of EAL, especially for those who have low proficiency levels in English language skills (Ammon, 2001; Fernández Polo & Cal Varela, 2009) and whose writing presents rhetorical divergences (i.e. syntax, negative L1 transfer features, etc.) from the discourse norms widely accepted by the editors and reviewers of the international English-speaking community (Curry & Lillis, 2004; Flowerdew, 1999a, 1999b, 2001; Hanauer & Englander, 2011; Lillis & Curry, 2006, 2010). The extent to which authors regard linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors as the main reasons for manuscript rejection is one of the issues to be discussed in this paper.

Despite the fact that competent members of scientific communities are expected to be able to produce research papers in their field, there has been little research on how academics acquire the requisite skills and what kinds of skills are in fact involved. EAL scholars who write in English may thus find themselves in a situation where their articles do not get accepted by English language journals, but without knowing where to turn for writing assistance so as to gain the acceptance they seek and get their papers published. Cases in point are the members of the Spanish scientific community in most disciplinary areas. It is only recently that a new strand of survey-based studies (Ferguson et al., 2011; Fernández Polo & Cal Varela, 2009; Moreno, Rey-Rocha, Burgess, López-Navarro, & Sachdev, 2012; Pérez-Llantada, Plo, Ferguson, & Gibson, 2011) have emphasized the actual needs of Spanish scholars for scientific writing assistance and for pedagogical resources to train them in ERPP skills. However, the differences and similarities of Spanish scholars' needs in specific disciplinary areas and particular academic settings remain widely unexplored.

This paper reports on some of the results obtained from the analysis of the responses to a large-scale online survey which was administered to a number of Ph. D. researchers from various disciplines, either affiliated to a research-only institution or to one of four universities in Spain (see Moreno et al., 2011). On the basis of the responses to this survey, our paper focuses on the field of Medical Sciences, which is one of the areas of research in which the scholars identified themselves as needing greater specialized assistance in skills relevant to academic writing. We specifically aim to investigate Spanish scholars' attitudes and motivations, writing strategies, past experiences with publishing in medical English-language journals, difficulties encountered and future needs for training in ERPP.

The findings obtained from the analysis of these responses constitute the first stage of a broader project which intends to investigate, in successive phases, the predominant rhetorical strategies used in English and Spanish medical discourse with the ultimate aim of preparing assistance materials and implementing courses which will be of use to non-English language background scholars, and more particularly for Spanish researchers seeking to achieve the necessary academic writing skills in the field of Medicine.

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